



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Arrests of Opposition Members in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 2, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

At the May 19 meeting of the Permanent Council, the United States welcomed the May 12th decree of Azerbaijani President Aliyev instructing Azerbaijani government officials nationwide to guarantee that Azerbaijan holds free, fair and transparent parliamentary elections this fall. If implemented in both letter and spirit, this decree can be an important step in Azerbaijan's democratic development.

Most unfortunately, events that took place in the two days following the issuance of the decree immediately cast doubt on the Azerbaijani government's commitment to implementing it.

Azerbaijani authorities denied an opposition request to hold a rally in Baku, subsequently used force to disband small groups of protesters, and detained more than 40 opposition members.

The United States joins the OSCE Office in Baku and the European Union in expressing its deep concern that such actions undermine the spirit and the letter of President Aliyev's decree.

The President's decree affirms the people's constitutional right to peaceful assembly. The United States calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to guarantee that the right to freely assemble, a vital element of a nation's ability to conduct free and fair elections, is protected, in the very spirit of President Aliyev's message.

Thank you.